

The Social Questions Bulletin

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THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE
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312

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A STATEMENT OF OUR POSITION

WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

To our members: *This Bulletin calls for your vote. It is essential that you read every word.*

The receipt of the October Bulletin has informed you that this organization is still alive. To the staff this is an unexpected lease of life. For our own resources were not sufficient to enable us to carry on. The special gifts of last year were not enough to keep us going. Nor did the drive for new Bulletin members bring in sufficient. We are living today by grace of outside help which enabled us to pay our debts. (See later note on finance.) But this is not likely to happen twice. We begin, therefore, an experimental year. The budget is cut to the bone. If it now proves to be beyond the capacity of our membership this year will be our last.

In this situation your secretaries feel very strongly the necessity of focussing our work as definitely as possible upon the crucial situation in which this country and the rest of the industrialized world now finds itself. On no other terms can this organization justify its continued existence, requiring as it does gifts that involve selection between worthy causes, and deductions from incomes already too meagre. If we are to live, it must be on the basis of a vital part in this struggle between an old and a new world. If this is to be our last year we must put something into the record that will count in the future.

WHAT WE FACE

This new year for us is one in which a page of history has been turned. The joint program of the NRA and AAA, following the attempts of the RFC, is the official recognition of the fact that capitalism can no longer run on its own power. It has long used the state, in tariffs, subsidies, contracts and exemptions, but has concealed both its greed and its incapacity to stand on its own feet by specious phrases about rugged individualism. Now the mask is off. We have definitely entered the period of state capitalism. Intelligent supporters of that system in other lands are anxiously watching us to see whether governmental powers can succeed where private enterprise has ignominiously failed.

To realize where this leads one must understand that state capitalism and economic Fascism are synonymous. The use of state power to bolster up the failing capitalist economy is the economic essence of Fascism. In class terms (witness Germany and Italy) it is the expression of the lower middle classes trying to save themselves from the pressure of big business on one side and that of rising labor on the other. It also registers middle class humanitarian ideals in an attempt to regulate the excesses of the profit system. At the same time it leaves the final control in the temple of finance and takes away from labor its only real protection in a capitalist world, the right to strike. The consequence is a lowered standard of living for most of the people, and the increase of both the debt structure and taxation. When our lower middle classes find that they have lost the security they thought to gain, their emotional reaction will be akin to that of similar groups in Germany. They too will carry on a campaign of hate and persecution against Jew, Negro and Communist. Its beginnings are already here.

STRATEGY?

It is inevitable that a dying capitalism should thus seek to prolong its life. But the period can be shortened and its excesses minimized by resistance among the classes that are now deceiving themselves and becoming the unconscious instrument to fasten the destroying grip of a dying system a little longer upon themselves and other suffering millions. The social strategy of all those who want a new world is to keep as many of

the middle class as possible from going Fascist. (In this classification most of the farmers and skilled workers belong in their psychology, habits and ideals.)

This possibility places a heavy responsibility upon those religious groups whose social platforms run counter to the ways of capitalism. What then is the particular duty of an organization like ours, which has for some years been educating its members in the economic and ethical inadequacy of capitalist society, which is in this field the advance guard of a denomination whose general and other conferences have put in the record their judgment of the competitive profit system?

OUR JOB

Carrying on our original purpose of working through education and inspiration, our task is, by analysis of the current situation in the light of the ethical principles of our gospel, to

1. Demonstrate the increasing inability of the capitalist economy to provide economic security.
2. Show its growing destruction of its own values—initiative, freedom, property.
3. Clarify the outline of the society we both need and desire; e.g., it must be classless, provide plenty and development for all, etc.
4. Critically analyze the methods available for organizing a new order—e.g., a planned economy; maximum and minimum income; the obligation of socially useful labor; universal social insurance; universal participation in control, etc.
5. Analyze and evaluate methods of social change; e.g., force and violence; confiscation; dictatorship, etc.

BUT FIRST

There is the question of the relation of our name to such wide objectives. We were first a social service organization. Now we are much more. We went on to social justice and then to social transformation. When the secretaries suggested it was time to make our name fit the facts our president, Bishop McConnell, felt it had too much historic value to be discarded. Therefore, they proposed to the annual meeting that a declaratory sentence be adopted to be printed always after the name that would make clear what we were doing. The meeting voted to submit the following sentence for adoption or rejection by the members: *"An organization which seeks to abolish the profit system and to develop the classless society based upon the obligation of mutual service."* At the same time you are asked to vote (ballot at the end of this Bulletin; we can't afford a letter) on making the membership fee \$1 instead of \$5. This means that all who give more than one dollar will be classified as supporting members. They are advancing the cause as well as belonging to it.

In voting on this definition of purpose (it must be brief) you must not understand it as a creed. Since our method is educational and inspirational any who desire to move in this general direction and to find out what is thereby involved may properly associate themselves with this fellowship, as may also those who are not sure but want to find out.

OUR PROGRAM AT HEADQUARTERS

We can issue this year only the research numbers of the Bulletin. Yours will reach you early each month. You will notice that we have changed the name to "The Social Questions Bulletin." This was done by vote of our officers and after consultation with some of our members. It gives us a more precise description of content. We think it should help you in introducing the Bulletin to others. One or two other numbers, like the present one, will be in the nature of a special communication to members, to take the place of the former mid-month number. The others, beginning with the October issue on the Churches and NRA, will discuss questions of current importance—other phases of the New Deal, the relation of Christianity to Communism (a pertinent topic now that prominent voices in the church are posing the alternative "Christianity or Communism?"), etc.

A second item in our program is the active encouragement of small reading and discussion groups. Any two or three persons may form themselves into such a group. That these may bear directly upon the present situation and prepare for intelligent action in crisis, we propose self-classification by our members and others as follows: 1. Those who know that something is wrong with capitalism, but don't know what (see 1 and 2 under Our Job above). 2. Those who know what is the matter with capitalism and are through with it, but who do not know exactly what kind of a society they want in its place (point 3 under Our Job). 3. Those still farther along in their thinking who are now ready to discuss the technique, the strategy of getting over from the old to the new (points 4 and 5 above).

To help in these discussion groups and in other ways, we have in preparation some popular four-page leaflets, to be known as Crisis Leaflets. These will be the size to carry in your pocket or pocketbook, and they can be used the way earlier Methodists used their tracts. They will sell for a few cents each. Some of our preacher members assure us that they can find interested people in their churches who will make it their job to have these on hand and to organize their distribution and sale. The Bulletin

may be sold in the same way, as is already being done by some members. Send for bundles.

Another item in our program is a coast to coast tour by H. F. W. January 6th to February 17th. The proposal is to have one day conferences in the cities where we have active groups. His expenses can be met by a public evening lecture on "What We Can Learn from the Soviet Union," or on "The Soviets' Challenge to Religion," at which a 25c admission fee will be charged. The object of this trip is discussion with local groups of the objectives and methods outlined in the above program, in the hope that increased activity will result. Key men are already making plans for this trip. The December and January Bulletins will tell you places and dates.

The secretaries' speaking, writing, and group and personal discussions will, of course, continue. The Rural Committee through its members scattered across the country is making a first-hand survey of the operation of the AAA—how it is affecting the farmers; whether the farmers think it will work; what their reaction is to cutting down production while thousands starve in the cities. This data will be the basis of the annual rural number of the Bulletin prepared by the chairman of the committee. The resources of our office and the Grace Scribner memorial library are at your disposal.

YOUR PART

You will think of ways that you can take hold. Some of the things that are already being done may suggest possibilities for you.

The Social Action Conference held in Chicago in 1932 had a vitality which has communicated itself. A second one has just been held there. California is planning its second. Last summer two women initiated one in Iowa, out of which has come one to be held this month in Kansas City. Others are being planned. Should there be one in your area? There is, of course, no hard and fast line between thought and action. Also activists need to be sure that they have a philosophy behind what they do.

Our social service commissions haven't begun to exhaust possibilities. We just have a letter from Herbert C. Snyder, the new layman-chairman of the Wisconsin conference commission. He has outlined an 8-point program, not all new, since that group has already been active. It includes, besides the preparation of a careful statement to present to the annual conference, and arrangement at the conference session for luncheon discussion, and a general meeting, such other features as a retreat for preachers; preparation of special material for young people and brotherhoods in churches where the preachers are not friendly to the commission's work—that is a sort of going over their heads to the people; a speakers' bureau; special committees—for young people, especially with an eye to those who get started thinking in this field at their Epworth League Institute; for enlistment of women; and for seeing to it that preachers who are outspoken about the present situation get a square deal. Other commissions may think of other important things to do.

An appropriate activity everywhere is the setting up of hearings where unemployed workers and farmers can tell their own stories. The simple technique for this, successfully used in Chicago, New York and rural sections of Michigan, may be had by writing to Professor Arthur Holt, of the Chicago Theological Seminary. With proper publicity this is a first class way to get the community acquainted with the plight of its own people. There is no reason why it cannot be used also to show the community the plight of our economic system.

Several of our preachers are organizing the unemployed. Examples are the work of W. B. Waltmire in Chicago and Charles C. Webber in Elizabeth, N. J. The former organizes locals which he ties in with a movement initiated by the League for Industrial Democracy. The latter has started a new kind of group, a Workers' Fellowship, with organization of the unemployed as one phase of a varied program. Both of them cooperate with preachers and churches when this is possible—but it is not always possible; work with, rather than in rivalry to, unemployed groups organized by socialists and communists; lead the unemployed in aggressive action in their own behalf and also—here is their chief emphasis—help them to face up to the cause of their misery and to see that we must get rid of capitalism and get something else in its place.

Preachers' committees of social action have sprung up in several places to help in specific strike situations. Since workers and farmers are striking in all parts of the country there is plenty of chance for this type of activity. In New Jersey a Passaic Valley Committee of 50 for Social Action, interdenominational, has taken a hand in the silk strike. It took the side of the workers at the silk industry hearings in Washington and before the mayor of Paterson, where the strike centers. In New Haven, Conn., the Methodist Preachers' Meeting has voted unanimously to uphold the right of the wire workers to organize under NRA, a right which the employers violated by dismissing union members. In Los Angeles, open shop city, Methodist preachers have been back of the organization of a citizens' committee to support the ladies' garment workers testing out their right to organize. Also an investigating committee is looking into open shop activities. It calls on preachers to take their laymen with them and visit the picket lines, especially observing the conduct of the "Red Squad" police. In the San Joaquin Valley, in California, preachers of several denominations set out at once after

the shooting of striking cotton pickers at Pixley to get and report the facts.

A competent first hand observer of some preachers in action in a strike situation makes an incisive criticism. He says that their first move is good. They defend the right of workers to strike and the freedom of speech. But presently they are smoothing things out, trying to get peace in the community. In this way they play into the hands of the reactionary employers. As he puts it, "These social preachers are a new social problem." In other words, having opposed the officers of the law for putting order before freedom they now put peace before justice. The real difficulty is, they do not recognize the fact that such situations are incidents in the struggle between the classes.

Some preachers have declared their sense of oneness with labor by joining a preachers' union, the Ministers' Union of America, 242 East 14th St., New York, organized in 1931. Its preamble states that members are "conscious of the social injustice of our present economic order" and believe that "this injustice cannot be removed without the efficient organization of all those who engage in socially necessary labor."

Some of our preachers are sticking to the matter of getting brotherhood in preachers' salaries. This represents to them part of the larger task. The Ohio conference has just organized a Fellowship of Sharing, a voluntary group, of which those receiving \$1500 salary give \$3 and those higher salaried an additional dollar for each \$100 above that figure, to help those receiving less.

A most important activity for each of us is to use to the utmost our specific niche in the church. The church itself is tied in tight with a decaying economic system, but there is a measure of freedom in it. Our members have pulpits, Sunday school classes, high school and college classrooms, secretary and editorships. Many of them are key men and women in the church. How can we make our own jobs count?

FOR ACTION

We want action. That is, active members. We know we can't get this merely by asking for it. Those who have eyes to see an old order passing and a new one dawning, and insight to know that creative human effort is a factor in this process will be eager to act. These will survey methods of action and choose things they can do. Some of the methods always used when a cause is vital will be used again. Also new methods for a new day will be found.

We can't emphasize too much the importance of little groups of preachers in a community meeting at least once a month to discuss the crisis. From this will logically follow the starting of discussion groups with their lay men and women. Part of the activity will naturally be reading and recommendation of books and pamphlets, distribution of our tracts and Bulletins, getting new members for this organization. Routine compels but it must give way to vital action in these times of emergency.

A movement to use religion in this historic crisis for the transformation of society must grow from person to person, as did early Christianity and early Methodism. *Do you feel any responsibility? Will you organize a discussion group? Will you appoint someone to distribute our new leaflets in your church and community? Write and tell us.*

FINANCE

We are able to start this new fiscal year with a clean slate. This is only because of a special gift of \$1500. This comes from the Albert L. Wilson Fund, established to perpetuate the work and influence of a preacher—most of his life a Methodist preacher—who believed in and worked to realize the goal which we seek.

Our Executive Committee has voted a budget of \$4,000 as against the \$7,000 voted—but not realized—last year. The proposed cuts are mainly at two points—halving the number of Bulletins issued and accepting W. L. C.'s offer to go on a part-time basis and do some free lance writing and teaching.

How precarious our financial situation still is is shown by a few figures. Our income last year from regular membership fees and contributions was but \$3,488. As a result of a special appeal \$1,169 additional was subscribed, making a total of \$4,657. We must probably count on a further spread of unemployment and salary cuts among our members. Therefore, if we are to go on this year two things must happen: *every member who can possibly do so must give as much as he did last year; and there must be some additions.* One of our members wants a quota, to be suggested by the office. The above comes as near to this as we can go.

YOUR VOTE

Put *Yes* or *No* after each of the two following propositions, tear off and mail at once to our office, or make duplicate on postal card and mail us if you keep and use your Bulletins.

Membership \$1.00 instead of \$5.00.....

A declaratory sentence, as indicated in italics on page 2, to be used always following the name of our organization.....